Productive Fandom

Lamerichs, Nicolle

Published by Amsterdam University Press

Lamerichs, Nicolle.
Productive Fandom: Intermediality and Affective Reception in Fan Cultures.
Amsterdam University Press, 2018.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/66421.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/66421
1. Shared Narratives: Intermediality in Fandom

Abstract
Fandom is a rich and vibrant culture of rewriting – a formation of media spaces and audiences that come together online and off-line. In this introduction chapter, I provide a short overview of fandom and diverse fan activities. These practices have been studied in the interdisciplinary field of fan studies, also known as fandom studies. I provide a short overview of the field, its history, and state-of-the-art studies. Finally, I propose a theoretical model that can be used to study fan practices, with attention to their media relationships (their inter/transmediality), affect, characters, and worlds within the productive space of fan practices. This model is not limited to understanding fan activities, but highlights properties that are increasingly important in the analysis of any media text.

Keywords: Fandom, intermediality, transmediality, affect

Introduction
Whenever I wonder what being or becoming a fan means, I think about the first time that I attended a convention for Japanese popular culture. I had been a fan for years and subscribed to online forums to discuss manga (Japanese comics) and anime (Japanese cartoons). Still, I only had a handful of off-line friends who understood how much this fiction actually meant to me. When I was eighteen, I travelled across the country to a weekend-long event where fans met up to enjoy Japanese popular culture. This convention, Animecon (2005), was held in a hotel, and nearly one thousand people supposedly attended as visitors and volunteers.

My best friend had sewn me an outfit as Aerith, a fictional character from a game that I liked (Final Fantasy VII) and had told me that many other attendees would also be dressed up. I knew that many fans engaged
in different creative hobbies, such as sewing or writing, and I showcased my own drawings of *Final Fantasy* characters on different Internet sites as well. Japanese popular culture inspired young fans like me to engage in arts and crafts. I heard that these practices were motivated at the convention through costume competitions, workshops, and much more. Still, wearing a costume of one of my favorite characters seemed somehow odd; then again, the whole convention seemed odd. My friend described it as a type of Disneyland where fiction would be all around you. We had made a little group of *Final Fantasy* characters with whom we would compete in the costume competition and had practiced weeks before. I had prepared for the convention for a long time, but, really, I had no idea what to expect.

Upon arrival, I was dazzled by the busy, colorful atmosphere. In the lobby of the hotel, many people sat in costume and seemed to know one another. Characters that I had only seen on-screen passed me: Mrs. Hellsing, Lulu, Rinoa. It was uncanny. Everywhere, fans discussed animation and games excitedly, admired characters, and quoted their favorite lines. Many fans were so excited that I did not really know how to converse with them. This was my community, and many of the fans were undoubtedly on the same Dutch online forums that I frequented, but I did not really feel at home. The convention fell outside all of the social categories that I had ever seen. Many people wore geek shirts, there were men dressed up as women, and people playing card games at tables in the lobby. It seemed as if everyone communicated through fiction, but did not really communicate with one another.

Somehow, the convention was very different from online fan forums, where I could simply comment on anything and discuss with everyone. Back then, I was already subscribed to several fan communities. Since the late 1990s, I had been active on MangaDVD, a Dutch forum for Japanese popular culture. The Internet had been in its early stages when I had subscribed, but, by the time of this convention, many users had affordable and unlimited access to this technology. Through my online activities, I made many new friends, some of whom I had already met, whom I hoped to meet at this convention. The Internet enlarged my world, as I know it did for many other people at that time. Distant places suddenly seemed nearby.

I had long defined myself as a fan and felt comfortable in online fan spaces. At Animecon, I started to doubt myself. Who were these eccentric people and what did we actually have in common? A friend saw that I was uncomfortable and took me to the video game room to show me the titles that we could
play. We battled in *Soul Calibur 2* and talked about the characters. I was more at ease and started to get accustomed to the atmosphere. Yes, as fans, we did share some things that united us: not personal knowledge about one another but a different type of capital, related to the subculture in which we engaged. We shared knowledge, social contacts, creativity, and, above all, a passion for particular stories and visual designs.

When I donned my costume the next day, I gained a sense of belonging. The outfit made me fit in visually and became a greeting card. Conversations became easier because fellow fans found topics to converse with me about: my character, *Final Fantasy*, video games. Some visitors recognized me from the forum because they knew that I was going to be wearing an Aerith outfit. They called me by my nickname, “Setsuna”. By the end of the weekend, I had made many new friends while watching anime, playing games, and attending workshops. From that point on, fan conventions seemed exotic and diverse to me, as well as attractive. Increasingly, they became a social context that I could fall back on: a place called home.

Fan conventions are only one manifestation of a fan community and its organizational structures. Fans come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from gamers to sport fans, from *Harry Potter* readers to collectors of *Beatles* records. It is often tricky to pinpoint what all of these groups have in common. Although we have our assumptions about what makes a real fan, we can only examine our own fan loyalties or recognize them as a social stance of others. As a cultural trope, fandom is not always recognized as a creative pursuit, but it is instead equated with obsession and excess (Bailey, 2005). The media serve us images of men as “Trekkies”, addicted gamers or hooligans, while women are seen as groupies, sobbing over pop music or indulging in celebrity gossip. Fans are prone to be stigmatized, even by those who are part of the communities. Through their behavior, fans seemingly transgress social norms and are easily labeled as deviants as opposed to other types of audiences, such as those of the high arts.

I am particularly concerned with media fans who invest in popular culture and are inspired by television series, movies, or digital games. These fans engage in a wide range of creative and social activities to pay tribute to the stories that they love. Some collect signatures, merchandise, or blog images of their favorite shows; others attend concerts to be as close to their favorite bands as possible; and yet others share passionate reviews online.

My interest, however, lies in specific modes of fan productivity that are creative, and engage in storytelling and play. Creatively, fans publish written stories (“fan fiction”), sew costumes of their favorite characters’
outfits (“cosplay”), design different types of games, and make visual art and videos, among other outlets. Thus, fans produce different types of narratives and objects and express themselves through play and performances. Through these homages, fans mediate existing symbols, plotlines, characters, and settings. These fan creations are heavily inspired by the existing text or “source text”, but they also create new textual relationships.

Although contemporary media fandom flourishes in off-line sites such as fan conventions, the Internet has increased the visibility of fan practices and the number of people who actively engage in them. On distinct media platforms – here defined as unique software environments with specific social and technological affordances – fans show their creative products and discuss or refer to popular culture. Such fan activities may occur on blogs and forums, but they can also be staged in digital games or elsewhere. These organized fan activities are captured under the term “fandom”. This concept refers to the sum total of the fan communities and individuals who are connected by their love for a particular text. Moreover, fandom refers to the interpretive and creative practices in which invested audience members engage. Fans and scholars alike use the term fandom to depict the activity of fans as a genre phenomenon (anime fandom) or as related to a particular text (Harry Potter). Online fan communities often celebrate particular content, ranging from texts to characters (Booth, 2010).

Productive Fandom offers a detailed study of fan cultures as they are lived – social, creative, and affective spaces of productive reception. By drawing from insider experiences, this study provides a rich tour of the worlds of fans, but it stresses that these domains have much to offer to the study of narratives and media audiences. While my ethnographic methods are detailed in the next chapter, I shall briefly note that I understand ethnography as the study of lived cultures in their natural settings or fields through the use of qualitative methods. I support these findings with methods of narrative inquiry to generate further insights into the themes and structures of fan works.

Theoretically, I am interested in charting how fan practices migrate across different media and production contexts. I signify these processes of transfer through the concept of “intermediality”. These migratory structures are not only apparent in fandom, but they have also increasingly characterized the production culture of the media industry itself. In this chapter, I describe the creative activities of fans and how they have been researched in previous studies. Subsequently, I discuss my own theoretical framework and provide an overview of the book.
Fan Studies

Historically, the earliest research on audiences developed as a sociopsychological field that deployed quantitative methods. Specifically, from the 1940s until the 1980s, researchers generally favored “uses and gratification” models that could measure how media fulfill the needs of their audiences. The qualitative study of media audiences was pioneered in the 1980s through the works of Stuart Hall (1980) and David Morley (1980). Specifically, John Fiske (1990) studied the reception of popular culture in his early work and showed that audiences are not passive consumers but resistant readers and consumers who adapt culture. A groundbreaking work in the turn to qualitative study was Ien Ang’s study (1985) of Dallas audiences, in which fans were the topic of an extensive study for the first time.

Inspired by this field of thought and by fandom itself, the first fan scholars started their research in the late 1980s. Henry Jenkins (1992) and Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) provided insights into how fan communities operate at conventions. They also paid attention to how fans analyze and subvert source texts by producing their own fiction based, for instance, on Star Trek. Notably, “slash” – the queering of fictional characters – is explored in their writings as an interpretive anomaly and is also the subject of Constance Penley’s early groundbreaking feminist essay Brownian Motion: Women, Tactics and Technology (1991). This early research showed a positive image of fandom because the studies aimed to correct the stereotypes surrounding fans as deviant or obsessed. In a similar vein, it emphasized the subversive and critical elements of fandom to validate these cultures as topic of research. By portraying fans as creative women and social individuals, these early publications set the tone for fan studies, but also proved that fan studies ran the danger of glorifying its informants.

The development of the field since the early 1990s has been highly interdisciplinary. I agree with Busse and Hellekson (2006), who emphasize the diversity of fan studies in terms of theory and approaches. Over the years, scholars have approached fandom as a form of religion (Couldry, 2003) and as a performance (Coppa, 2006b; Lancaster, 2001), but other scholars have studied it using psychoanalytical concepts (Matt Hills, 2002a) and feminist thought (Penley, 1991). Moreover, fan studies have increasingly flourished in relation to Internet studies. The intense user practices of fans exemplified online group formation and knowledge practices (Baym, 2000).

The online turn towards social networking sites and user-generated content influenced the field. Industries started to encourage migratory and interactive behavior across media platforms through the production of
extensive websites, discussion pages, and promotion tools (Ross, 2008). Since
the late 1990s, television changed from “must-see TV”, structured around prime
time, to “must-click TV”, structured around interactive models (Gillan,
2010, pp. 1-3). Henry Jenkins (2006a) in particular has shown that fandom
is intimately connected to the development of a mainstream participatory
culture in which the industries increasingly share spaces with their audi-
ces and spur them to become cocreators. He argued that this increased
dialogue between users and producers even has political implications and
shapes a new public sphere (Jenkins, 2006a, pp. 21-22).

The terminology of Jenkins has been influential in the field thus far;
however, his view of technology and participation has also been advanced
to reveal the underlying power dynamics and competences that are central
to media use (Burgess & Green, 2009, p. 6; Schäfer, 2011, pp. 42-45). In recent
years, the emphasis in fan studies has been on digital technologies rather than
off-line practices. The focus on the media industry itself sparked audience
studies on labor and leisure to discern the liminal position of fan participants.
Scholars also defined fandom as “serious leisure” (Stebbins, 2007):

The systematic pursuit of an amateur, hobbyist or volunteer core activ-
ity sufficiently substantial, interesting, and fulfilling in nature for the
participant to find career there acquiring and expressing a combination
of its special skills, knowledge, and experience (p. xii).

This concept has been applied to explore the motivations of those who,
for instance, modify computer software (Postigo, 2007) and can helpfully
illuminate other fan practices, such as writing fiction.

The concept of leisure is put to the test, however, by those who inter-
rogate fandom as a form of labor and emphasize that the media industry
increasingly profits from the activities of fans. These two concepts do not
exclude each other: what the industry considers to be profitable can be
entertainment for fans and provide a sense of ownership over the fiction
that they love (Banks & Humphreys, 2008). Still, in an economy in which
work and play increasingly coincide, labor and leisure may not be the best
ways of framing audience engagement (Deuze, 2007).

What theories on labor do show is that the competences individuals
acquire in fandom can be operationalized in other domains. These com-
munities function as “affinity spaces” (Gee, 2003; Knobel & Lankshear,
2007) in which like-minded individuals find one another and advance
one another’s skills. Such spaces foster a broad “media literacy” that is not
limited to interpretation, but stimulates technological interaction and the
development of creative skills (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Buckingham, 2003; Ito, 2010). The critical competences that fans learn are particularly apparent in digital fan cultures that offer playful learning spaces in which fans can experiment and collaborate in their interaction with technologies and texts.

The question of the ways in which fandom is different from other audience cultures fascinates me, especially in the case of digital fandom (Booth, 2010). The media industry increasingly stimulates audiences to interact with their content intensively and socially. Early research has already depicted fans as active audiences, but this activity needs to be specified in light of the changing media landscape. My study analyzes fan activity in two unique ways. First, I investigate online and off-line spaces in relation to each other to provide a coherent view of fandom as it is lived. I make room to discuss off-line spaces, such as fan conventions, but I also include personal reflections. Second, I argue that fans are not characterized primarily through their social and participatory relationships but instead, as discussed in the next section, through their creative practices and their feelings.

Productivity and Affectivity

Influential studies have already depicted fandom as productive, and I want to use these studies as a jumping board for my own definition. The creativity of fans can be read as a type of appropriation that borrows and repurposes existing cultural materials to produce something new. Productive fandom has often been compared to quilting, wherein old materials are torn apart and reassembled (Bacon-Smith, 1992, p. 57; Bird, 2003, pp. 51-85). An equally appropriate term to describe this phenomenon is rewriting, which highlights how fans attribute new values to existing stories (Plate, 2011). Fandom cannot be understood solely as a reiteration or recombination of source texts.

For instance, the literary activity of fans is comparable to that of post-modern authors who reinterpreted classic stories in their novels, such as The Hours (based on Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway), Wicked (based on Baum’s The Wizard of Oz), and Foe (based on Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe). Derivative writing has a larger history and presence than fandom itself and is not without political or subversive implications. Such critical perspectives also emerge in fandom where the source text is not only copied but also subverted, in terms of gender, for instance. Fans actively work with the blanks in the source text that spark their imagination and give way to oppositional readings.
Fiske (1992) in particular has theorized fandom as a “textual productivity” (id., p. 39) that is characterized by the virtuosity and creativity of the audience rather than emotional or social investment. He also offers two other lenses through which we can analyze fandom: “semiotic productivity” (id., p. 37), which is integral to all audience behavior to make sense of the text, and “enunciative productivity” (id.), which covers meanings that are shared and spoken, and through which fans perform their identities to insiders and outsiders. According to Fiske (1992), only textual productivity is specific to fandom, and this concept has received much attention in fan studies as a way to demarcate fans from other audience groups (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, p. 148; Crawford, 2012, pp. 120-137).

I understand fans’ textual productivity in a broad sense in this book and want to include creative processes, not only finished texts or products (Cherry, 2016; Hills, 2014). I am particularly inspired by studies on creativity that foreground how interpersonal relationships are an integral part of creative processes and growth (Gauntlett, 2011). I interpret textual productivity as the creation of fan works that are intimately connected to the source text. I am interested first and foremost in charting the narrative relationships between the source text and the fan text. I do not limit fan texts to written texts but include forms of play, critical interpretations, and material or embodied performances. Earlier narratological studies, such as Barthes’s work on fashion (1990), have advanced my understanding of the text as something that is not purely written but can convey messages through other forms of communication, such as fabric. Thus, I speak of fan practices and works frequently to avoid the connotation with the purely written.

In addition to textual productivity, I believe that affectivity is crucial for fans. In their reception, fans draw from a felt and embodied response towards the text and its characters; in other words, being a fan is an experience that is grounded in a feeling – an admiration of texts that are used to connect to others and the world itself. Thus, affect is closely related to social formations online and off-line. Fandom is a particular type of interest group, however, that often foregrounds the feelings towards the media text within the social communication. This is closely connected to how fans perform their identity within fan communities. Louisa Stein (2015) stresses that a “culture of feels” – a culture of intimate emotion and high performativity – is vital when fans share their interests on platforms such as Tumblr. Fans are deeply engaged with popular content that leads to specific structures of close reading and emotional forms of reception (Biltereyst & Meers, 2006; Jenkins, 2006a, p. 204; Kaplan, 2006, pp. 150-151). This comes with a certain
ambiguity because fans may also maintain critical distance and judge a product aesthetically within their communities.

Ultimately, affect helps construct the identity of the fan, which is grounded in an emotional ownership of media content. This emotional ownership is achieved through creative practices, the purchase of objects or memorabilia, and the establishment of social bounds with like-minded individuals. Alignment with the media text is a purposeful and reflexive activity because fans consciously reiterate their feelings toward the source text. These feelings are not purely aesthetic but are hailed by fans in other social domains. That is to say, fandom is a way of making sense of the world through felt and shared experiences.

Historical Perspectives

The origin of the term fandom is rather unclear. Its earliest media citation appears in a sports column of the Washington Post on 10 October 1896. The word “fan”, in turn, is an abbreviation of fanaticus or “fanatic”, which has connotations of “fancy”, religious zeal, and overactive engagement. It is debatable where and when the actual history of fandom as a social and cultural phenomenon began. Since Ancient Greece, storytelling has always been an active and dynamic process that relied on appropriation and catered to its audiences (Landow, 2006; Ong, 2002). Fandom is often compared to this tradition of folk culture in which myths are shared and retold (Jenkins, 1992, pp. 268-274). Thereby, it opposes the recent historical emphasis on authorship (Foucault, 1984).

The history of being infatuated by fiction is integral to the reception of art and literature as aesthetic practices that should overwhelm their audiences. However, the division between high and low art led to different prototypes of how these audiences were viewed. Since the seventeenth century, enthusiastic audience members of high art have been captured by the term “lover”. The lover is a figure that has a long cultural history in the Netherlands as the “liefhebber” (Keller, 2011). Similar to the verb “fan”, the term “lover” implies an emotional attachment to a particular subject. This term has been carefully construed around discourses of art and around mastering art as an apprentice. As Keller (2011) argues, the “lover” is closely related to later types of fandom that celebrated the literary genius. Another earlier term is that of the “connoisseur”, the expert who is highly knowledgeable about a certain topic. Today, the fan is often distinguished from such high arts audiences or experts as someone who is excessively
affected by existing material and engages with popular culture rather than the high arts.

As early as the nineteenth century, fan practices started to flourish around literature and scholarship. Esteemed authors such as Lord Byron, Walter Scott, and Rousseau already had a following of individuals whom we could describe as fans (Watson, 2011). Admirers made pilgrimages to their houses, hoping to catch a glimpse of these extraordinary individuals. Others would send fan letters, a practice that was already fairly common in the nineteenth century (Watson, 2011). Through new communication technologies such as the telegram, this practice increased. For example, after Arthur Conan Doyle allowed the famous detective Sherlock Holmes to die, he received so many protest letters and comments that he eventually raised the character from the dead. Although these images are rather positive, at the same time, the image of the fanatic became stronger. In Germany, Goethe received a large fan following at the end of the nineteenth century, especially with his novel *Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers* (1774). There are contemporary accounts of young boys who dressed up as Werther, a phenomenon dubbed “Werther Fieber”. The media related this strongly to fanaticism, blaming a supposed increased suicide rate on Goethe’s book (Ziegler & Hegerl, 2002).

The rewriting practices of media fandom, however, are a fairly new phenomenon that coincided with the founding of modern popular literature. Writing derivative stories has an extensive history in the reader communities of Jane Austen, Lewis Carroll, and Arthur Conan Doyle (Pugh, 2005; Stein & Busse, 2012). The emergence of amateur and fan fiction at the end of the nineteenth century coincided with the increased literacy of the population and the founding of magazines, newspapers, and the book industry targeting a mainstream audience (Landow, 2006). This popular literature was easily readable and interesting to explore. Characters such as Mister Darcy and Sherlock Holmes captivated audiences and were reimagined in personal stories.

The first traces of fandom as an institutionalized phenomenon can be found in the 1930s when several literary fan clubs for the *Sherlock Holmes* novels were founded (Coppa, 2006a). In the 1950s, the institutionalization of fan practices continued with the founding of the first fan conventions: readers of science fiction would meet up in hotels to attend events such as panels in which they could discuss the material with its creators or among themselves. Today, fan conventions are widely attended. The San Diego Comic Con draws over one hundred thousand visitors annually. In Japan, fan comic fairs such as Comiket can draw several hundred thousand visitors.

Fan practices were initially organized locally off-line, but today they are also embedded in online communities. As the Internet began to gain
ground in the 1990s, fan practices became more visible. Fans could now meet up with like-minded individuals virtually and publish their products. Early online fan practices operated through listservs, news servers, and message boards. Media platforms for fan activities such as FanFiction.net (1998) were established later, while blogs such as LiveJournal (1999) increasingly became a way to communicate about media and publish fan fiction. The founding of these sites coincided with the development of online social media, which has been captured under the marketing term Web 2.0, popularized by Tim O’Reilly.

Although fandom has historically flourished in autonomous and domestic spaces, modern fandom is staged across different online and off-line sites that are increasingly shared with media producers. While modern fandom is deeply embedded in online media, it is not restricted to these platforms. Fandom is still a subculture that is deeply rooted in social spaces such as conventions, clubs, or film sets, but it is also innately tied to economic spaces, such as shops (Larsen & Zubernis, 2013). Collectors, for instance, purchase objects at stores and display them at home, for instance, to perform their fandom (Geraghty, 2014). While fan studies tend to focus on digital platforms and emerging media, off-line spaces are still integral to fan identity.

One danger of fan studies is overlooking those individual fans who do not participate in digital or traditional fandom. As Sally Wyatt (2003) noted, the “non-users” of the Internet are especially worth studying, despite being difficult to locate, because their active resistance and social motivations are key to understanding the technology. Similarly, those fans who are not active in fan communities can provide valuable insights into the participatory culture around media. They may, for instance, reveal criticisms of the social norms and conditions of fandom. Increasingly, fan studies have also focused on those who not only reject fandom, but interact with others by showing their disgust for particular media content or celebrities – the “anti-fans” (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007). Starting from these critical investigations, this study hopes to capture the figure of the fan through diverse affective investments and modes of belonging.

**Intermediality**

Fan practices can best be understood through the concept of intermediality. My working definition of intermediality is: a transfer or combination of form and/or content that relates an individual media text to other media texts of the same or a different medium. In this section, I explain how the
term clarifies the dispersion of media content. I also suggest a typology that breaks down intermediality into several subsets that signify the different patterns in which these intermedial processes are formed.

Defining today’s media relationships is a rather daunting challenge because intermediality is defined through different and competing terms. Moreover, the interpretation of the concept differs by academic context and author. As Grishakova and Ryan (2010, p. 3) write,

> While the concept of medium has become very prominent in narratology, there are so many candidates available to refer to the relations between narrative and media that terminology has become a true nightmare: what, if any, are the differences between transmediality, intermediality, plurimediality, and multimediality (not to mention multimodality)?

My choice for intermediality is led by the belief that it is a suitable umbrella term that emphasizes exchanges within and between media in the broadest sense, as suggested by the prefix “inter” or between. This has also been argued by Grishakova and Ryan (2010, p. 3). In a similar fashion, literary critic Kiene Brillenburg Wurth (2013) states that intermediality is applicable to the analysis of contemporary media texts and the complex ways in which one medium summons or includes another.

While intermediality is still subject to critical attention, I believe that the concept can helpfully illuminate the unique qualities of particular media and signify what is gained and lost in any mediation process. My understanding of intermediality is operational. Intermediality forms a guiding concept that I articulate by showing how it functions in practice, by drawing attention to what it can do. I use the term to investigate the structures of media content and to explain how fans and the media industry construct relationships between media texts.

In my categorization, intermediality is an inclusive process that covers not only the relationships between media but also their “medium specificity”: the distinctive features, modes, and aesthetic conventions of an individual medium in its interplay with other media (Doane, 2007). N. Katherine Hayles (2004) in particular has made a claim for medium/media-specific analysis of online texts that should account for their unique properties, including their material and spatial presence. Through J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin’s concept of “remediation” (1999), she argues that we must not understand the media text in isolation but rather in relation to other media: “Whether in print or on screen, the specificity of the medium comes into play as its characteristics are flaunted, suppressed, subverted,
shared narratives: intermediality in fandom

reimagined” (Hayles, 2004, p. 10). Hayles’s plea for situating the materiality and architecture of the particular medium has informed my understanding of intermediality.

To account for medium specificity, I speak of different media modes (e.g., visual, auditory) in my analyses. I am particularly inspired by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), who have written amply about the cultural modes within one medium, and by the work of Karin Wenz (2006), which has captured the modes of digital games as an inter-/transmedial phenomenon. She shows that digital games rely fundamentally on other media, such as literature. This focus on modes helps distinguish patterns of difference and similarity among individual media texts and between old and new media. This resonates well with Bolter and Grusin’s concept of “remediation” (1999), which has grounded this study. The two authors argue that new media often integrate properties of old media, whereas old media repurpose themselves with features of new media (p. 9). Thereby, media engage in an ongoing competition with one another by integrating one another’s modes.

Although intermediality has gained new relevance today, the exchanges among media are historically ingrained in the practice of art. The relationship between the visual arts and literature, for instance, has often been subject to analysis. Historically, intermediality stems from “intermedium”, a term coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1812) to discuss aesthetic modes in various media. Higgins used the concept again in the 1960s in his manifest Statement on Intermedia (1967), and it quickly became integrated into the art scene through the artist network Fluxus. Using the term “intermedia”, Higgins described art forms that blur the distinctions between individual media by combining different media modes. His example was visual poetry, which conceptually relies on a visual and linguistic mode. The concept was further developed in Germany in late twentieth-century aesthetic and literary studies as well as media studies (Helbig, 1998; Krewani, 2001; Müller, 1996; Rajewsky, 2002; Spielmann, 1998), a debate that advanced my understanding of the term.

The German debate brings to light that relationships among media must be distinguished on several levels. First, intermediality can mean combining various media in one product or artwork (Rajewsky, 2005, pp. 51-52). For instance, a game can be intermedial by using music, voices, movies, and text. The combination of media can be rather self-contained, which is often called “multimediality”: a combination in which each medium does what it does best and still remains distinctive in the text. German theorists often describe this as nebeneinander (“next to each other”). Think of a book that makes sounds when you press it or a slide show that uses an
embedded video. In other cases, however, the different media are much more dependent on one another, which is often described as “integration”. In this case, the different media work together, or miteinander (“with each other”). The different media then construct the artwork together, as, for example, in an opera, which can present music, visuals, and entourage as a combination of media.

Second, intermediality can be understood as a process of transfer or “transmediality” when content flows across unique media and media platforms. Transfer can be a migration of many parts of the narrative or just a few elements. In a broad sense, the narrative can be extended to other media through spin-offs (e.g., *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*), or it can be related to particular genres, such as film noir (e.g., *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*). However, these transfers can also be thematic in that they mediate specific aesthetic or textual cues. The concept “adaptation” is at hand when a narrative is reiterated anew or repurposed for a different medium (Hutcheon, 2006).

Transfer does not always imply a thorough adaptation of the entire text. The process can also be limited to a small wink or a “reference”, such as the quotation of a movie line. Critically, it is important to note that media texts not only mediate one another’s narrative content but can also transfer the aesthetic conventions of a medium. An example of this is the mediation of the video game *Heavy Rain* (2010) in the television text *Sherlock* (2010-), which particularly mimics its stylistic visualization of the player’s options. In addition to these transmedial processes, several authors have also stressed the need for a separate category of “intramediality” that describes processes of transfer or combination between media texts of the same medium, as summarized by Dena (2009) and Rajewsky (2005).

Within this exploration of intermediality, two competing terms require unpacking. First, my understanding of transmediality emphasizes a process of transfer, as outlined above, but the term remains contested today. In German theory, transmediality is often discussed as a subset of intermediality or as a semiotic transfer, comparable to a theme or motive (Rajewsky, 2002). However, Anglo-American theories often explore transmediality more colloquially to highlight relations between and combinations of media content (Jenkins, 2006a; Ryan, 2004; Stein & Busse, 2012). Specifically, Henry Jenkins has molded the concept to “transmedia storytelling”, in which a narrative is told across different media such as comic books or movies. While I explain this concept in detail in the following sections, it is important to note that I consider transmedia storytelling to be a subset of transmedia design, which captures not only processes of storytelling, but also transmedia performances and play.
Second, contemporary understandings of intermediality are closely aligned with the discourse of “intertextuality”, which defines the relations among texts. Intertextual analysis shows how textual meaning is always shaped by other, older texts (Kristeva, 1981). Some scholars such as Genette (1997) understand the concept narrowly as literal citations or identifiable references to other texts. Other critics, such as Julia Kristeva, however, understand intertextuality more freely as cultural discourses that thrive around a text. Thus, the definitions of “text” in intertextuality studies are diverse. Moreover, they are often not limited to written texts but also include spoken texts, generic conventions, images, ideologies, and cultural clichés. Maaike Meijer (2006) helpfully distinguishes all these different layers of intertextuality. I favor intermediality as a term because it focuses less on the (literary) text and more on relationships of form and content across media. It must be noted, however, that intertextuality in its narrow sense – the phenomenon that literary texts can refer to, or use, other literary texts of the same medium – is a subform of intermediality that is similar to intramediality.

My own terminology thus captures intermediality as an overarching concept and puts it to use in a narrow sense as a combination of content within one medium. The two related terms that I deploy are transmediality and multimediality. I consider transmediality to be a subset that captures the transfer of media content and form to other media. Multimediality refers to those texts whose media modes can be understood in isolation, or as separate within the media text. Thereby, I understand both as specific structural process within intermedial texts. This division is in line with the German discourse on media relationships as nebeneinander (next to each other) and miteinander (with each other).
In the next sections, I will particularly detail the cultural implications of convergence – the repurposing of media content and functions across media systems – through my own term, transmedia design.

Transmedia Design

Contemporary media content flows across individual media and is repurposed, branded, and discussed. Henry Jenkins (2006a) conceptualized modern media culture through the concept of “convergence” – a technological phenomenon in which systems innovate towards performing similar tasks and functions. However, Jenkins rephrased the concept as “convergence culture” (id., p. 16) suggesting that these technological innovations have wide-ranging cultural implications. He describes convergence culture as a landscape in which “old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (id., p. 2). Media convergence is upheld by the industry’s participatory culture in which producers and consumers increasingly interact.

The ideals of media convergence increasingly shape the designs and content of the industry itself; that is to say, the combination of different media platforms is also the core business of the media industry. The concept of “transmedia storytelling” points to these changes in how the industry extends, promotes, and narrates its stories (Jenkins, 2006a). The media industries increasingly spread and extend their narratives across diverse media that range from comics and animation series to games and movies. Henry Jenkins coined this term in Technology Review (2003) to account for how a story is cocreated by various corporations to include new information, thus establishing a larger story world or franchise. His key example is the narrative structure of The Matrix (1999-2003), which consisted of three movies and a digital game that, together, established its story world (Jenkins, 2006a). While a television series or movie used to limit the story to that medium, today, bits and pieces are spread over various platforms: “Younger consumers have become information hunters and gatherers, taking pleasure in tracking down character backgrounds and plot points and making connections between different texts within the same franchise” (Jenkins, 2003).

Transmedia storytelling establishes an overarching narrative and fictional world across media platforms. Individual media may add background information, new characters, or deepen plotlines (Hassler-Forest,
This process also opens marketing venues because different media products have the potential to draw new audiences. Ideally, a narrative promotes “hypersociality”, as Mimi Ito argues (2005, p. 32). Audiences are thus motivated to familiarize themselves with instances of the narrative and discuss them in their respective audience communities. Jenkins's use of transmediality is inspired by Marsha Kinder's study (1991), which included franchises such as the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles in terms of “transmedia intertext” (p. 38). Kinder argues that transmediality favors active readership as a type of literacy that teaches children how to connect media products and recognize certain tropes (Kinder, 1991, pp. 49-50). Ideally, the children also grow up with new installments of the texts suitable for their age that foster their attachment to the narrative world.

Critically, the concept of transmedia storytelling has been subjected to debate. Authors have argued for the inclusion of marketing texts, such as billboards, and merchandise, such as toys or stickers (Hardy, 2011; Long, 2007). I agree that such peripheries are increasingly rich in terms of narrativity and require theorization. However, transmedia storytelling raises the fundamental question of if and how fan works are part of these cultural dynamics. By emphasizing industry-driven practices, Jenkins (2006) neglects the liminal examples of transmedia storytelling that stand between fandom and official production (Derhy Kurtz & Bourdaa, 2017). For instance, the current Doctor Who (2005-) series is innately tied up with its fandom, which kept the doctor's adventures going when the BBC cancelled the series in 1989 (Perryman, 2008). Specifically, Big Finish Productions (1998) was central to the revival of Doctor Who. Prior to the establishment of Big Finish, many of their employees worked for the unlicensed “Audio Visuals” series, which produced audio plays. The employees befriended the previous cast and crew, and managed to obtain the copyright for the series audio material. They established Big Finish to produce official audiobooks and invited fellow fans, previous actors, and writers to join their endeavors. In this fan-driven context, many of the current Doctor Who writers and actors met.

While transmedia storytelling is clearly visible in modern media, I propose the use of the alternative “transmedia design” for two reasons. First, my cases indicate that many of these designs are not limited to storytelling, but also include transmedia performances or play. The term storytelling may be misleading because these products may have narrative qualities but do not further the storytelling process. Moreover, the concept of storytelling presumes coherence among the different media products during design implies the building of a franchise. Design can refer to multi-authored production and the fabrication of different products that have different
material, narrative, and interactive features. This resonates with our current media landscape, in which production companies promote and extend their narratives through a heteroglossia of products with fundamental differences in appraisal and authorship. These transmedia instances diverge and do not necessarily add up to a grand narrative. Different versions and adaptations of a text that may conflict are made. The *Star Trek* series and films, for instance, offer many contradictions for the observant viewer. However, while the events and stories may conflict, recognizable characters and the story world itself give coherence to these transmedia products.

Second, design emphasizes that the media industry has a clear commercial gain with transmedia content. Plenary texts are meant to create brand loyalty, draw new followers, or maintain the fan base when the show is on hiatus. The *True Blood* (2008-) billboards and promotion sites, as described by Hardy (2011), may have some narrative value but aim to draw new viewers. The online platform for the series *Psych* (2006-) or “Club Psych” rewards viewers with an elaborate point system and extra video material when they engage in discussions or games. Club Psych echoes the recent trends towards “gamification” or the application of game design strategies such as rewards and rules to non-game contexts (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011). The participatory strategies of *Psych* are highly interactive but are not purely defined through narrative structures. The forum relies on play that motivates consumer loyalty through points and special perks. Transmedia design helpfully rephrases these practices that are on a sliding scale between branding and narrative or playful extension.

The increase in transmedia design and participatory regimes in media culture raises critical questions. Today, scholars analyze how the industry caters to its visible audience by exploiting, rewarding, and engaging fans (Banks & Humphreys, 2008; Consalvo, 2003; S. Murray, 2004). Studies on fans show that the negotiation between the audience and industry is complex and that producers are still seeking new ways to share their content with their audiences (Gwenllian Jones, 2003; Shefrin, 2004). However, transmedia design often implies a particular audience that is loyal to the text and its distributed canon. As Suzanne Scott (2009) argues, transmediality creates a complicated place for fan products as certain products are capitalized by the industry through contests, licenses, or otherwise. This creates a culture in which fan content is incorporated by the industry:

Media producers, primarily through the lure of ‘gifted’ ancillary content aimed at fans through official Web sites, are rapidly perfecting a mixed
economy that obscures its commercial imperatives through a calculated adoption of fandom’s gift economy, its sense of community, and the promise of participation.

At the same time, media producers continue to emphasize their authorship through modern communication technologies, such as DVD commentaries in which they comment on the creation process (Shefrin, 2004). The industry increasingly motivates fan practices of television series and profits from them. Fandom is licensed, promoted through contests, and made visible on the industry’s website.

This is not without problems. For example, after a contest held for the television series Heroes (2006-2010), the writers used the ideas of fans in their second season without crediting them (Hassapopoulou, 2010). The mediation between the industry and fans presses questions not only of labor and agency but also of different value systems. The creative industries appropriate fan practices, which results in a phenomenon of reappropriation. Critically, this phenomenon also implies that the industry may shy away from the resistive and queer content of fandom that does not resonate with their envisioned audience. Following the logic of transmediality, the industry can favor particular content that is loyal to their narrative while being more transformative and critical expressions run the danger of being marginalized further. Thus, transmedia design can be a regulating practice that edits and curtails the creativity of fans. It sometimes shows censoring and corrective traits.

Conceptualizing Productive Fandom

This study sets out as an ethnographic investigation of texts and textual meaning. Several core concepts have shaped this study on productive fandom and characterize my approach.

*Intermediality:* While I have already introduced intermediality, I want to briefly summarize my approach in this conceptual model. Intermediality is used on two levels in this book. First, I view fan works as intermedial structures that are inspired by particular source texts and other fan works. Second, I pay ample attention to transmedia design by the media industry. I argue that the logic of transmediality increasingly shapes the production and reception of fan works. While fan works are perceived to be creations in their own right, they are also considered to be interpretive expressions
of the source text. These fan narratives are not limited to written texts but include visuals, such as artworks, or material objects, such as costumes.

**Characters and story world:** Fandom offers alternatives to plot and focalizations that enable characters to live well beyond their original texts. This study pays specific attention to characters and fictional universes. In fandom, characters and worlds are endowed with an emotional life. Through transmedia fan products, the universe and the development of existing characters is extended, questioned, and reimagined. I read these interpretations as singular and personal, but they may be multiplied in fandom when fans reach a literary consensus over these transformations. Another line regarding characters and fans and their shared common ground emerges through the queer reading practices of fans that provide fluid sexual and gendered portrayals of fictional characters. Liberal fan practices, such as cross-dressing, also demonstrate this awareness.

**Affective reception:** Media texts generate affects with their audiences. I suggest that meaning is not allocated within the text but is generated by its audiences. They are at once a disposition for viewing and an aftereffect, visible in sentiments such as nostalgia. The media experience of fans is embodied and affective, which has consequences for their sense of identity. Fans interpret media experiences as an intense aesthetic experience that also differentiates them from others, both within the fan community and outside it. The production of the fan work coincides with the recontextualization and reimagining of the source text. Both fan authors and readers actively interpret, contextualize, and situate the source text. This source text can be transformed through different interpretive strategies, but this transformation is already part of the work that a reader has to do to decode it at all. Reading implies reproducing texts according to contexts, learned systems, and codes. Reading also means engaging in a deeply felt and embodied experience.

**Networks of production:** Fan works increasingly share spaces with the media industry, thereby reaffirming its status and copyrights. In fandom, authors and readers engage in interpretive work and textual production together. Media fans have a shared lingua franca and social protocols. However, they also have hierarchies that result in part from their interpretive and creative competences. Social status may be awarded to fans who have been in communities for a long time but can also pertain to their skills and the quality of their fan texts. Although retelling goes back to oral cultures, in
the modern media landscape, it is connected to politics and commerciality as audiences speak up against the media industry itself.

Identity: The identity of the fan is constructed through interpersonal relations and feelings. The fan creator is especially central in this study of productive fandom. Fans learn to classify and cultivate their feelings for and knowledge about media texts. In terms of social background, I refrain from essentialist readings based on the sociocultural backgrounds of fans. While I account for the gender, ethnicity, and sexuality of fan authors, I do not want to provide an essentialist view of these identity markers. The fannish self is not a given, but a socially constructed concept: a project of self-formation that is constantly enacted in fan practices. Fan identity comes to the fore through several lenses that structure this book:

a) The interpretations of the text that are grounded in social networks of locality and nation-states but also of global fan communities;

b) The queer and gendered identity of the fan that surfaces in fan practices and structures the norms, sexual practices, and embodiment of the fan;

c) The identity of the fan as a player who combines pop-cultural elements and structures these through fannish play;

d) The identity of the fan as constructed along affects. These affects are embodied but can be cultivated within fan networks and through creative fan practices.

This framework is at the heart of my study and has grounded the core concepts that are addressed in the various chapters. Every chapter examines one aspect of this framework, but these mission statements surface throughout the book. Thus, this study explores the afterlife of popular stories and the ways in which audiences express their feelings for them time and again.

Outline

This book explores the various ways in which fans rework stories and the intermedial relations that they thereby establish. Popular culture contains characters, worlds, and plotlines that speak to us. To give a multidimensional view of fan practices and allow for some comparisons among different fandoms, each chapter focuses on a fan community that thrives around a particular television series or game. I have sampled the cases strategically as informed by theory. Moreover, they are connected to my European viewpoint, which forms a unique entry point to the field of fan studies.
that has predominantly focused on Anglo-American texts and audiences. This is not to say that the book is limited to European data, because it also includes many American and non-Western examples. In fact, I want to press the reader to understand fandom as a transcultural space in which fans with different national experiences and memberships come together.

I have chosen to limit myself to a specific medium or fan practice in each chapter to allow for in-depth analysis. The different television shows or genre fandoms have been selected on the basis of their genre, popularity, and the diverse makeup of their audience community. This cross-comparative design is necessary for two reasons. First, the cases show the heterogeneity of fandom by focusing on local contexts and cultural practices. I advance the specificity of these communities: their differences and commonalities. Second, the different cases support the investigation into unique sets of transmedia design propelled by the media industry and shed light on our current media landscape.

Between the main chapters, I embed ethnographic vignettes that chronologically describe my fieldwork at fan conventions, fantasy fairs, and other platforms where fans meet. Thus, I divide my personal experiences and encounters from the more tangible data to provide a descriptive idea of what fandom means today. The vignettes capture fan communities in which I was already engaged, particularly the Dutch anime scene and the conventions that thrive around this genre. However, I also explore other local fan cultures that are distant from my own Dutch context, such as Comiket in Japan. Each vignette is placed between the chapters but should be read on its own terms; that is to say, the vignettes do not function as bridges or introductions to the following chapter, but have thematic connections with the empirical cases. Specifically, the vignettes detail how the experience of fandom can be understood from the inside out. The vignettes reflect on my own status as a fan and the people whom I met in these communities. The next chapter is a short methodological overview that explains the different methods that I use and positions me as a scholar and ethnographer.

The first case discusses the BBC series Sherlock, an adaptation of Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories. As an introduction to fan cultures, I discuss the viewership of fans and how they make sense of a text. Through several in-depth interviews, I highlight the literary competences of fans. The chapter shows how fans interpret characters in light of previous texts and their own experiences. I elaborate upon the reader-centered theories by Jonathan Culler (Culler, 1975) and Monika Fludernik (1996) that focus on the “naturalization” of texts, by which viewers and readers make sense of existing texts by relating them to what they have read and experienced, as well as
what they expect from a text based on cultural and literary conventions. Within the fan communities of *Sherlock*, naturalization becomes particularly apparent because the series is based on older stories that have been reworked throughout the years. The central questions in this chapter are as follows: What are important themes for fans when they interpret the source text? How do they make sense of characters in relation to earlier (fan) texts?

The second case discusses specific genres that fans establish in their practices by focusing on fan fiction inspired by *Glee*. I sampled and closely read several exemplary fan texts with permission from their fan authors to frame the literary landscape of *Glee* fan fiction. The chapter examines the online context of fan fiction through intermediality. For instance, queer themes emerge in *Glee* quite regularly and are mediated in its fan fiction. In addition, I operationalize the concept of narrative closure to analyze how fans resolve the events and characterizations from the source text. I seek to understand how fans remediate the source text in terms of genre and focalization. Important questions in this chapter are as follows: What literary strategies do fans display? Which narrative themes are reproduced or subverted in *Glee* fan fiction?

The third case discusses a role-playing game based on *Firefly*, a television series that was cancelled in 2002. Since the series has not reached narrative closure, it persists in the hearts of fans who rework the story world in new and unexpected ways. Specifically, I discuss different role-playing games of *Firefly* audiences that develop the potential of the text. Theoretically, I emphasize the fictional world through the concept of the “transmedial world” (Tosca & Klastrup, 2011), which depicts a universe that is established across different media. I add to this concept with possible world theory. The study problematizes fandom as a phenomenon by relating it to game culture. The games are analyzed as cultural products that combine various media and also purposely appropriate existing fictional content. I pose questions such as the following: How do fans perform existing story worlds? How do they remediate a television text into a game and what does this mean for the medium specificity of a narrative? How can we distinguish between fandom and practices of play?

The fourth case focuses on the performance of cosplay or dressing up as fictional characters. Specifically, I analyze the practices of fans of Japanese popular culture. Through interviews and ethnographic observations, I show different motivations and feelings related to cosplay. Fans purposely create their own identity within cosplay by identifying themselves with fictional characters and explicitly actualize narratives in daily life to bring characters to life. This chapter shows the many ways in which fans relate to existing
characters and how they inspire them in their daily life. Theoretically, I frame cosplay through affect theory. Affect is understood as a fundamental condition that allows us to make sense of aspects of our life and valorize them. Central questions in this chapter are as follows: How do fans establish a sense of identity through cosplay? What types of affective relationships are constructed by cosplaying?

The conclusion recapitulates this study with a summary of the findings and revisits my conceptual framework. This chapter also has two specific focal points. First, I reflect on the various ethnographic methods that I use throughout this research and outline the benefits and drawbacks of the various participatory stances that I adopt. Second, I raise several methodological and theoretical concerns for future fan studies.

I hope that this book will provide inspiring accounts of fandom for both academics and fans themselves. I have written the book in an accessible way so that professionals and interested readers with different backgrounds can use it to get an idea of fandom and relate it to different viewpoints and theoretical considerations. For scholars of arts, literature, and new media, this work provides new views on how audiences interpret and extend popular culture. Media are not secluded in their black boxes but constantly spill over into everyday life. Reception is more than just making sense of a text; fictional characters are felt, imagined, and believed in. Fandom shows the scope and breadth with which stories affect us and the ways in which we maintain these stories, even long after they are finished.